

**THE WASHINGTON
ARCHAEOLOGIST**

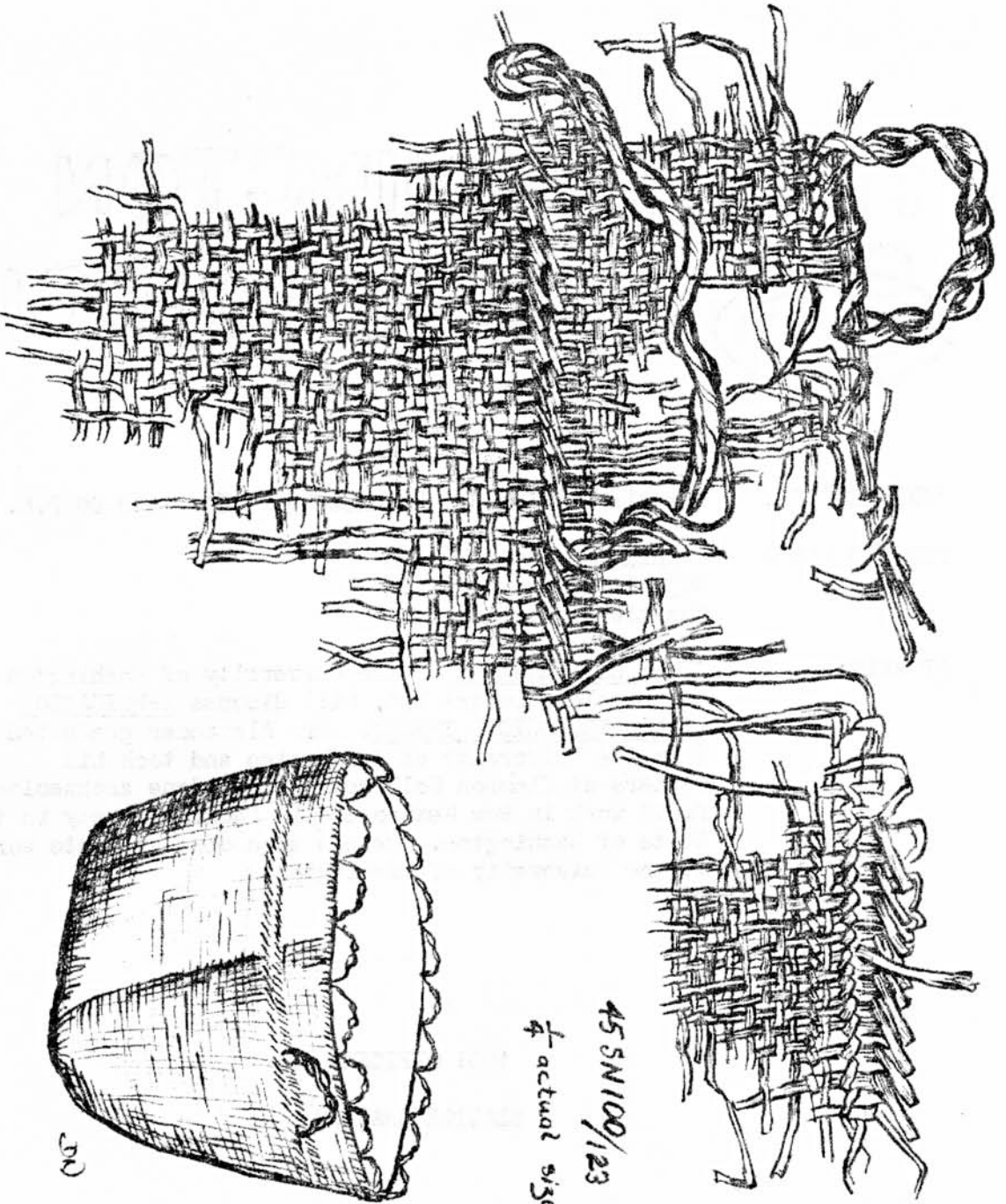
WASHINGTON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

REPRINT

VOLUME IV, NUMBER 11, PAGES 2-5 | NOVEMBER 1960

OPEN PLAITED BASKETRY FROM SITE 45SN100

BY DEL NORDQUIST



45 SN 100/123
1/4 actual size

PLATE I. Detail of basket with suggested reconstruction.

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OPEN PLAITED BASKETRY FROM 45SN100

It is now evident that the open plain-woven basket is the most frequent type found in site 45SN100. This type of burden or work basket has an affinity to similar types found widely distributed in Western Washington, particularly in the Puget Sound region where it is known as the "clam basket." The designation of clam basket is an oversimplification of use, although open-work baskets were used for such purposes. Even in a predominantly shellfish gathering economy the uses of such basketry varied and served more than one purpose. Along the Snoqualmie River it is likely that mussels were gathered in such vessels, but also it must be considered that they were used for fish, vegetal food stuffs, and even bark and twigs used in the manufacture of household articles or for kindling fires. In any case it is unwise to assign a given use for the basketry in the absence of positive data. Until such data is found the basket type will be considered a work basket only. At present corroborating evidence would seem to support the conjecture that the site was used for fishing, e.g. many net weights, hooks, and the possible remains of a weir structure have been found. A final decision will await the investigation of the extended site in which it is hoped better preserved bone than that in the beach gravels will be found. At present it has been impossible to take a bone count and determine the amount of fish remains involved in the site.

In Volume IV, No. 8, the open weave was briefly discussed and illustrated. The accompanying illustration is similar to those previously shown, but of a different basket. Fundamentally, the technique is plaiting, a simple over and under technique where the weft alternates with the warp in creating the body of the basket. A reinforcement rod was attached to the body about a third of the distance from the top of the basket. The carrying handle of coarsely twisted material was entwined around the reinforcement and through the basketry. The remains of a border loop constitute another important feature of the basket. Although the basket is plaited, two bands of two-strand twining were used to finish the basket's upper edge. They are separated by one strand of plaiting. It is interesting to observe that the pitch of the opposed rows of twining is reversed indicating more than a virtuosity of workmanship, but a desire to add a touch of beauty to even the most utilitarian of objects. There is no doubt whatsoever that native peoples indulged in decorative inventiveness even in common household articles. Since every object was intimately, if not laboriously made, there was always time during the process of creation to think and indulge creative urges. A basket such as that under discussion was easily made by a basket maker. Similar types have been observed in construction and, depending on the size and other duties of the maker, can be woven in a portion of one day. However, it must be remembered that the preparation of materials for weaving are not included. If one made such a basket from beginning to end it would entail considerable time in procuring the fibers and the subsequent preparation of the warp and weft materials for use.

As yet no positive identification of the materials, other than that they were cedar (*Thyja plicata*) has been made. It is known that both the cedar roots and withes were used. Informants known to the author related the methods used. The cedar roots, best known for their use in the coiled basket, were sought where they grew straight and long. Usually these could be found trailing along in the decay of fallen logs. One informant (Henry Allen, a Twana, now deceased) related how he sought roots for his wife when in a dugout along the Skokomish River.

He found that after winter floods the roots of cedars which stood along the river would frequently be undermined and bared. These were gathered from the water side. The preferred roots varied in size from about 1/8 to 1/2 inch. Those midway between were thought best because they constituted the size usually split and used in the making of hard cooking baskets (spa 'ču). Cedar withes were gathered by Emily Miller, a Twana, and the author for the purpose of making work baskets. The withes were selected from those that hang from the lower branches of the tree in the deepest shade. The withes tend to extend downward and outward toward the periphery of the tree seeking light. If the shade is intense enough the withes are long and sparsely branched. The same sizes and criteria in the selection of roots applied to withes.

Both roots and withes are cut as long as possible. They are graded to length and diameter and bundled for splitting. The splitting nowadays is done by a kitchen knife although formerly it was stated that the clam shell knife was used. An incision is made in one end and with part of the root held in the mouth between the teeth and the other in the hand it is halved from end to end.

Dr. Gunther made a point of the use of the teeth in basket material preparation at the last meeting of W-A-S. Splitting may be done by a system of halving down the middle of each half, etc., until the desired widths are attained. Splitting for slats is usually done in a parallel slicing through the center if the wood is small, or through the center of halves if it is large and previously center-split. If greater precision is desired in the preparation of materials for fine baskets each split piece or slat may be trimmed to get more consistent widths. Apparently this was done through the skill of the maker and graded by eye in the old days. Today a gauge is used having two cutting flanges set into a handle through which the material is drawn.

Everyday baskets, such as that under discussion, were quickly made and fine grading of materials was not undertaken. The strands in the example illustrated varied from 1/8 to 5/8 inch in width. They were split flat and selected long. The reconstruction is based on many fragments found, some quite entire. It represented a composite, although containing the features illustrated on Plate I.

Although more than twenty specimens were examined, none revealed any indication of the bottom construction as being different from the sides. It was presumed that the sides and the bottom were the same and that they were not separated by any special technique or material difference. A single warp member would pass from one side around the bottom and back to the opposite edge. Thus it was with the majority of warps. In order to make a transition from end to side (or vice versa), keeping a straight or flared edge to the walls of the basket, splices were made. Weft members were woven and extended as needed in parallel rows around the basket. Wall reinforcements were entirely confined to the upper parts of the baskets, either singly or in pairs. To these all handles were attached because the walls of the basket could not take the strain of a heavy load. Reinforcement rods may be used at the upper finish of the basket, but not in the final interlacing of the finished edge. As in the example 45SN100/123 twining may take place in the finish of the basket. The reinforcement rods were usually bound to the vessel by wrapping the rods between each warp strand. As previously mentioned, handles were made by twisting a piece of rather heavy material into the wall of the basket and around the rods. It appears that both ends were

inserted and brought again to the outside and twisted or laced around the previously extended loop. It is not ascertainable as to whether the handles were placed in what might be termed the ends or sides of the basket. It seems unlikely that they were used in the corners as in some Puget Sound baskets. This latter conclusion is reached because all handles are attached parallel to the weft and not the warp. Further, no warp reinforcements were found through which a vertical corner handle could be affixed. The loops were made not unlike the handles and attached to the finished edge. Ethnic data supports the likelihood that they were continuous along the whole edge and used as a means of lacing the mouth of the basket shut when full.

Del Nordquist

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